

# **APPENDIX C-1**

## **OUTDOOR RECREATION AND CONSERVATION**

### **LEADERS' SURVEY**

### **SUMMARY REPORT**

**Outdoor Recreation Leaders Survey.** When developing the 2003-2007 SCORP, the authors learned of the issues and concerns facing public recreation leaders, and obtained information on the quantity and adequacy of public recreation resources in local communities. The Office of Energy and Planning worked with the University of New Hampshire (UNH) to undertake an Outdoor Recreation Leaders' Survey. The survey was used to gather information, create a forum for communication, and encourage participation from critical stakeholders involved in public recreation management and delivery. For the purposes of this survey, "public recreation leaders" were identified as directors (or heads) of municipal and state recreation agencies, as well as chairpersons of local recreation and conservation commissions. For the 2008-2013 SCORP, the database of public recreation leaders was updated and some minor modifications were made, but essentially the same sample frame was surveyed.

The 2008-2013 SCORP Outdoor Recreation Leaders' Survey (ORLS) utilized a modified Salant-Dillman (1994) methodology:

- In 2007 an introductory letter was mailed to a database of municipal recreation directors, the state parks and recreation director, recreation commission chairpersons (if the municipality did not have a paid recreation director), and conservation commission chairpersons introducing them to the study and inviting them to participate. The introductory letter also included a link to an on-line version of the ORLS.
- The ORLS was based on the 2004 Outdoor Recreation Leaders' Survey conducted by UNH. The survey was streamlined and modified slightly. There were several minor content differences between the recreation and conservation versions of the survey.
- A follow-up letter was mailed to all non-respondents approximately 1 week later, along with a paper-based version of the ORLS and another link to the on-line survey. There was no difference between the on-line and paper-based versions of the survey. Respondents were asked to choose one option to complete. Cross checks of survey respondents were conducted to ensure that only one survey was completed per respondent.
- A post-card reminder was mailed to non-respondents approximately 2 weeks after the follow-up letter and paper-based survey were mailed out.
- A final letter with a link to the on-line version of the survey and additional paper-based survey were mailed to all non-respondents approximately 3 weeks after the follow-up letter and paper-based survey were mailed out. This letter noted that this was the final opportunity to participate in the 2007 ORLS.

By June, a total of 69 responses were received from recreation directors (n=25) and conservation chairpersons (n=44). Total response to the 2007 Outdoor Recreation Leaders' Survey (N=69) exceeded the 2004 Survey effort (N=46).

**Findings.** The 2007 Outdoor Recreation Leaders' Survey attempted to investigate the key management and planning concerns of public recreation leaders. One of the critical issues facing public recreation delivery in New Hampshire is funding. For this study, the average annual operating budget for municipal recreation departments was \$240,000. Conservation commissions indicated that their average annual operating budget was \$2,500. Both numbers reflect the restricted resource environment impacting many of the smaller towns and communities in the state. In fact, access to funding was considered to be one of the key management challenges for recreation managers, as noted by both municipal recreation directors and conservation chairpersons. Despite the funding challenges, more than half of recreation directors and conservation chairpersons indicated that public funding support for recreation and conservation in their communities had increased in the past 5 years. Less than 5% of survey respondents indicated that public funding support for recreation or conservation had declined during that time period.

A funding challenge that impacts public recreation managers is the development of a diversified and stable mix of funding sources. The vast majority of respondents indicated that taxes/appropriated funds were the principle funding source for both recreation and conservation activities. Recreation directors indicated a more diversified mix of funding sources when compared to conservation chairpersons. A significant majority of municipal recreation departments receive funding from user fees and charges, with a portion of respondents reporting that they receive funding (in order) from private donations, public (state or federal) grants, corporate sponsorships, private foundation grants, and impact fees. Conservation chairpersons indicated that a variety of taxes were their primary means of funding conservation activities. A smaller portion (less than 25%) of conservation commissions indicated that they receive funding from private donations, public (state or federal) grants, private foundation grants, corporate sponsorships, user fees/charges, and impact fees.

Respondents indicated that the delivery and management of recreation services is typically carried out by a mix of full-time, part-time, volunteer, and contracted staff. Municipal recreation departments were more likely to have paid staff assisting with these efforts. The average numbers of full-time and part-time staff members serving the communities participating in this study were 2 (full-time) and 19 (part-time). Conservation commissions indicated that they rely heavily on volunteers to accomplish their mandates. Respondents indicated that recruiting, motivating, and retaining volunteers is a significant management challenge, and some conservation chairpersons indicated support for paid staff to help carry out their duties. Likewise, recreation directors also relied heavily on volunteers, with an average of 45 volunteers giving their time to assist with recreation delivery per community.

This study illuminated the need for adequate outdoor space for organized recreation and sport activities. This was a key concern for municipal recreation directors, as they identified *baseball/softball fields*, *multiuse athletic fields*, *nature/hiking trails*, *playgrounds*, skateboard parks, bike lanes/paths, and *municipal parks* to be among their pressing resource acquisition priorities. While not outdoor-focused, more than half of the recreation directors in this sample indicated that the acquisition of a *community center* was a significant planning priority in the next 5 years. Interestingly, 6 of the 8 resource acquisition priorities in the 2007 study (italicized above) were the same as the 2004 study.

Conservation chairpersons, on the other hand, identified *nature/hiking trails*, *natural areas*, *town/city forests*, and *multipurpose non-motorized trails* as their key resource acquisition priorities. All of these were also noted as significant priorities in the 2004 study, as well.

The survey attempted to shed light on the key management priorities for public recreation leaders. Municipal recreation directors identified *improving facility maintenance/upkeep*, *recruiting/retaining volunteers*, *developing new facilities for organized sports and athletics*, and *marketing recreation opportunities* as their most pressing management priorities. They also identified *addressing concerns with overuse of recreation areas*, ensuring public access to water-based recreation, new funding approaches, *increasing the annual operating and capital improvement budgets*, *increasing part-time staff*, *recreation planning*, addressing user conflicts, and improving linkages and connectivity as priorities, as well. The 2007 study included 8 of the top 10 management priorities (italicized) identified in the 2004 study.

Conservation chairpersons identified *protection of important natural areas*, *resource acquisition*, *recreation planning*, *increasing capital funding budgets*, *regional planning for trails and open space*, and recruiting and retaining volunteers as their key management priorities. Six of the top 7 management priorities (italicized) identified in the 2007 survey were in the top 10 priorities noted in the 2004 study.

Public recreation leaders were asked to indicate, in their own words, their top 3 management challenges. After condensing, coding, and categorizing their responses, the following themes emerged:

- Municipal Recreation Directors' Challenges:
  - Resource Management & Development
  - Program Development
  - Staffing
  - Financing & Budgeting
- Conservation Commission Challenges:
  - Resource Management & Protection
  - Education
  - Staffing & Volunteers

- Collaboration & Partnerships
- Oversight & Enforcement
- Planning & Public Policy
- Financing

Consistent with past SCORP survey efforts (1997, 2000, 2003), the 2007 Outdoor Recreation Leaders' Survey attempted to identify critical partnership efforts between various community groups to facilitate recreation delivery. The survey asked respondents to rank the *importance* of partnering with a variety of community groups and organizations, and asked them to rate their organization's *actual level of engagement* with these groups. By doing this, we were able to conduct a basic Importance-Performance analysis and identify potential partnerships that could be enhanced.

Respondents indicated that more effort should be placed on engaging in partnerships with the following groups, where applicable (results are ranked based on the significance level of differences between Importance-Performance scores):

- Municipal Recreation Departments
  - Conservation Commissions ( $t=5.79$ ,  $df=23$ ,  $p<0.001$ )
  - Trails Groups ( $t=5.62$ ,  $df=23$ ,  $p<0.001$ )
  - Private Landowners ( $t=5.56$ ,  $df=23$ ,  $p<0.001$ )
  - Planning/Zoning Board ( $t=4.82$ ,  $df=23$ ,  $p<0.001$ )
  - State Agencies (DRED, OEP, DES) ( $t=4.14$ ,  $df=23$ ,  $p<0.001$ )
  - Tourism/Visitor's Bureau ( $t=4.04$ ,  $df=23$ ,  $p<0.001$ )
  - Hospitals or Health Care Providers ( $t=3.44$ ,  $df=23$ ,  $p<0.01$ )
  - Colleges/Universities ( $t=3.28$ ,  $df=23$ ,  $p<0.01$ )
  - Public Housing Authority ( $t=3.67$ ,  $df=23$ ,  $p<0.01$ )
  - Schools ( $t=2.29$ ,  $df=23$ ,  $p<0.05$ )
  - Chambers of Commerce ( $t=2.94$ ,  $df=23$ ,  $p<0.01$ )
  - Senior Citizens' Councils ( $t=2.43$ ,  $df=23$ ,  $p<0.05$ )
  - Boards of Selectmen/City Councils ( $t=2.32$ ,  $df=23$ ,  $p<0.05$ )
- Conservation Commissions
  - Parks and Recreation Departments ( $t=5.32$ ,  $df=42$ ,  $p<0.001$ )
  - Schools ( $t=5.07$ ,  $df=42$ ,  $p<0.001$ )
  - Private Landowners ( $t=4.33$ ,  $df=42$ ,  $p<0.001$ )
  - Boards of Selectmen/City Councils ( $t=3.68$ ,  $df=43$ ,  $p<0.01$ )
  - Businesses ( $t=3.64$ ,  $df=41$ ,  $p<0.01$ )
  - Hospitals or Health Care Providers ( $t=3.53$ ,  $df=41$ ,  $p<0.001$ )
  - Trails Groups ( $t=3.47$ ,  $df=41$ ,  $p<0.001$ )
  - Voluntary Community Groups (sports-related) ( $t=3.47$ ,  $df=41$ ,  $p<0.01$ )
  - Voluntary Community Groups (non-sports related) ( $t=3.23$ ,  $df=41$ ,  $p<0.01$ )
  - Chambers of Commerce ( $t=3.37$ ,  $df=39$ ,  $p<0.01$ )
  - Planning/Zoning Boards ( $t=3.36$ ,  $df=43$ ,  $p<0.01$ )
  - Police Departments ( $t=2.91$ ,  $df=41$ ,  $p<0.01$ )

- Senior Citizens' Councils ( $t=2.80$ ,  $df=41$ ,  $p<0.01$ )
- State Agencies (DRED, OEP, DES) ( $t=2.67$ ,  $df=41$ ,  $p<0.05$ )
- Tourism/Visitors' Bureaus ( $t=2.21$ ,  $df=40$ ,  $p<0.05$ )
- Public Housing Authority ( $t=2.21$ ,  $df=40$ ,  $p<0.05$ )
- Transportation/Public Works Departments ( $t=2.03$ ,  $df=43$ ,  $p<0.05$ )

Interestingly, both recreation directors and conservation chairpersons noted that their organization's biggest partnership gap was with each other! The areas of commonality between these two groups, especially related to natural resources management and outdoor recreation provision, indicates an area ripe for partnership.

Recreation leaders indicated a number of significant benefits that accrue from their partnership efforts. Both municipal recreation directors and conservation chairpersons noted that partnerships help them better serve their constituents, increase their visibility in the community, avoid duplication of services, contribute to solving community problems, contribute to community development efforts, avoid unnecessary competition with other organizations, meet their organizational mandates, enhance their organization's prestige, and increase access to additional funding. In addition, municipal recreation directors indicated that their partnerships allowed them to gain access to additional recreation facilities, while conservation leaders noted that their partnerships helped them to acquire and/or provide access to land and/or natural areas.